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## A Brief History of Native Americans in the Detroit Area

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From the earliest contacts with Europeans in North America, the Native American participated in conflicts not of his own making and saw his way of life disintegrate in the face of foreign encroachment. He found himself taking part in wars between colonizing Europeans, fighting in intertribal conflicts to retain scarce land and wildlife resources, and being drawn into an economic dependency on an alien society. Unable to stop these events, the aboriginal Indians altered the traditional economic and social relationships in so many ways that they became a captive of white society and its institutions. Such was the case both in North America—and in Michigan. Present in the Michigan area long before the Europeans, the Indian's heritage was taken from them not only by conflicts and contacts with foreigners but by the effects these contacts had upon Indian settlement in Michigan and in the Detroit area.

As the archaeological record proves, Indians long occupied the area which became Michigan—especially the southeastern part of the state including the Saginaw Valley. While there has not been a satisfactory identification with specific tribal groups, evidence has shown that there was continuous aboriginal occupation in the state from the time of the Paleo-Indian hunter (c. 10,000 B.C.) to the late prehistoric period (c. 1650

1. For example, see James E. Fitting, *The Archaeology of Michigan* (Garden City, New York, 1970); Wilbert B. Hinsdale, *The Indians of*

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A.D.).<sup>1</sup> During the early historic period Michigan served as a strategic buffer zone between the Iroquois to the east and the Midwestern tribal groups to the east, south, and west of the state.

Often relying on travelers' accounts or folklore, attempts to geographically locate known Indian groups in Michigan during late prehistoric times have been numerous but not conclusive. Yet, from early French accounts, it is clearly evident that a group of Chippewa whom the French called *Saulteurs* were living at the Sault Falls in 1640 and that another group of Chippewa known as the Missisagi were at the mouth of the Missisauga River (near present-day Thessalon, Ontario) in 1634.<sup>2</sup> Ojibwa tradition maintained that the tribe had moved into the Upper Great Lakes area from the east, perhaps only shortly before European contact.<sup>3</sup> Upon arrival near the St. Mary's River, which joins Lakes Superior and Huron, they split in three groups: the Chippewa, the Ottawa and the Potawatomi.<sup>4</sup> The Chippewa took up residence along the southern shore of Lake Superior; the Ottawa moved into the upper part of Michigan's Lower Peninsula, into the northern part of Lake Huron, onto two islands including Manitoulin Island, and the northeastern edge of Lake Huron; and the Potawatomi moved down into southern Michigan. It may also be that prior to or at the same

*Washtenaw County, Michigan* (Ann Arbor, 1927); Wilbert B. Hinsdale, *Archaeological Atlas of Michigan* (Ann Arbor, 1931); Wilbert B. Hinsdale, *Distribution of the Aboriginal Population of Michigan*, Occasional Contributions, No. 2 (Ann Arbor, 1932); Charles Martinez, "The Indians: A Chapter of Their Life and Times in Oakland County," mimeographed (Burton Historical Collection, 1970).

2. Frederick Hodge, ed., *Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico*, Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin No. 30, 2 vols. (Washington, D.C., 1907); George T. Hunt, *The Wars of the Iroquois: A Study in Intertribal Trade Relations* (1940; reprint ed., Madison, 1972); W. Vernon Kinietz, *The Indians of the Western Great Lakes, 1615-1760* (1940; reprinted, Ann Arbor, 1965), 318; John Swanton, *The Indian Tribes of North America*, Smithsonian Institution, Bureau of American Ethnology, Bulletin No. 145 (Washington, D.C., 1952), 260; Emerson F. Greenman, *The Indians of Michigan* (Lansing, 1961), 13-14.

3. William W. Warren states that the Chippewa tradition places the original homeland of the Ojibwa on the Atlantic Coast. William W. Warren, *History of the Ojibwa Nation* (1885; reprint ed., Minneapolis, 1970), 79-82.

4. Andrew J. Blackbird, *Completed History of Ottawa and Chippewa Indians of Michigan and Grammar of their Language* (Harbor Springs,

time as the Potawatomi occupation of lower Michigan other tribal groups such as the Sauk, the Fox, the Mascoutin resided in lower Michigan.<sup>5</sup>

In early historic times which date to the first half of the 1600s for the Michigan area, the Huron occupied most of what is now southwestern Ontario, the Neutral lived just north of Lake Erie, and the Erie inhabited the region immediately adjacent to the southern side of Lake Erie.<sup>6</sup> No doubt these groups also penetrated into the Michigan area on occasion.

Beginning in the 1640s and continuing throughout the seventeenth century, the Iroquois warred upon their western neighbors and laid waste villages and populace alike in the Ontario, Ohio, and Michigan areas in their effort to gain and maintain control of the fur trade. As tribal groups became scattered, lower Michigan became a buffer zone between the Iroquois and the tribal groups to the west. Though Indians continued moving in and out of the Michigan area during this period, they did not maintain permanent settlements.<sup>7</sup>

About forty years later, there were specific references to Indian settlements in southeastern Michigan near Detroit which were made by European explorers. The Detroit River

Michigan, 1897; Hodge, *Handbook of American Indians North of Mexico*; Hunt, *Wars of the Iroquois*, 74, 120ff; Swanton, *The Indian Tribes of North America*, 263; Warren, *History of the Ojibwa Nation*, 81. In recent years the belief that the Ojibwa were composed of the Chippewa, the Ottawa and the Potawatomi has been brought into question. Based on linguistic and social organization data, Charles Callendar believes that the Chippewa (Ojibwa), Cree, and Ottawa should be placed together as Northern Algonkians and places the Potawatomi within the Central Algonkian grouping along with the Menominee, Sauk, Fox, Kickapoo, and Shawnee. Charles Callender, *Social Organization of the Central Algonkians*, Milwaukee Public Museum Publications in Anthropology, No. 7 (Milwaukee, 1962).

5. Emma H. Blair, *The Indian Tribes of the Upper Mississippi Valley and Region of the Great Lakes*, 2 vols. (Cleveland, 1911), 1: 146; Hunt, *Wars of the Iroquois*, 107-109; Francis Wakefield, "The Elusive Mascoutins," *Michigan History* 50 (Fall, 1966): 228-34.

6. Hunt, *Wars of the Iroquois*, *passim*.

7. For detailed information concerning Indian movements into and out of Michigan during the historic period, see W. Vernon Kintz, *The Indians of the Western Great Lakes, 1615-1760*; Hunt, *Wars of the Iroquois*; Emerson F. Greenman, *The Indians of Michigan*; and Glenn G. Stile, "The Indians of Cadillac's Detroit," *Bulletin of the Detroit Historical Society* 12, No. 2 (Summer, 1955): 4-8.

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narrows became known by several different Indian names including: *Waweatunong* (Crooked Way or Circuitous Approach), *Taychsarondia* (a reference to the bend in the river) and *Karon-taeon* (the coast of the Straits); and early French references to the Detroit vicinity included such Indian names as *Taochiarontion*, *Atiochiarontiong*, *Teiocharontiong*, and *Techaronkion*—all of which were probably derived from the same Huron word.<sup>8</sup> In one of the earliest descriptions of the area, Louis Hennepin, a Franciscan priest with the La Salle expedition in 1679, reported a large Huron village along the Detroit River which, according to Hennepin, was called *Teuchsa Grondie*.<sup>9</sup>

To further their interests near Detroit, the French began cultivating friendships with Indian groups in the area during the early eighteenth century. As early as 1700, the French military command held a council at Detroit with the Huron, the Ottawa, the Potawatami, and the Missisagua (Chippewa), the four known Indian groups residing in the general south-eastern Michigan, southwestern Ontario area.<sup>10</sup> Only a year later, the French established Fort Pontchartrain as a command post at Detroit. Under the direction of Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac, who was the fort's commandant, the French eagerly courted the friendship of the Detroit Indians both to promote fur trade and to use them militarily against hostile groups like the Iroquois. In his eagerness to woo local Indians, Cadillac reportedly had on hand dozens of mirrors, various kinds of thread, combs, porcelain, bolts of cloth, and several sizes of black and green beads. He also had some brandy.<sup>11</sup> With these gifts as inducement, his efforts proved successful. By 1703 the Huron, the Ottawa, the Potawatomi, the Chippewa, and the Miami had responded to Cadillac's overtures and had set up villages near the fort.<sup>12</sup>

8. Clarence M. Burton, *The City of Detroit, Michigan 1701-1922*, 5 vols. (Detroit, 1922), 1: 40; James V. Campbell, *Outlines of the Political History of Michigan* (Detroit, 1876), 37.

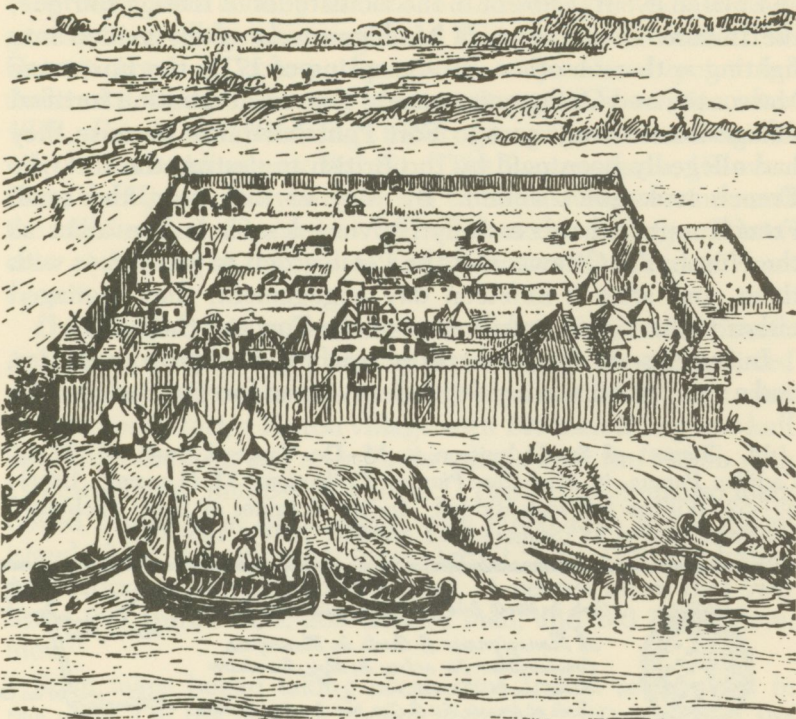
9. Burton, *City of Detroit, Michigan*, 1: 60.

10. William Renwick Riddell, "Indian Council Held at Detroit in 1700," *Michigan History* 15 (Summer, 1931): 445-58.

11. Grace Hawkins, "Some Ways of Managing Indians Around Detroit in Early Days," *Michigan History* 29 (Summer, 1945): 198-203.

12. Stille, "Indians of Cadillac's Detroit," 4-8. Clarence M. Burton, one of the early chroniclers of Detroit's history, noted that Little Turtle of the Miami stated in his speech at the Treaty of Greenville in 1795 that: "My father kindled the first fire at Detroit; thence they extended





*In 1701, the French established Fort Pontchartrain as a post at Detroit, with Antoine de la Mothe Cadillac as commandant.*

Yet, harmonious relations among these various Indian groups did not last long due to intense competition for land, the fur trade, and European trade as well as the presence of foreign manipulation. In 1706, the Ottawa Chief Miskouki reported warfare among the Indians near Detroit to the Governor General of Canada. In these skirmishes, the Huron and Miami were allied against the Ottawa, the Potawatomi, the Sauk, the Outagamie, the Kickapoo, the Quinepig, the Matamini, the Saulter, and the Missisagua.<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately this early conflict was not

their lines to the headwaters of the Scioto; hence to its mouth. . . .” Clarence M. Burton, *City of Detroit, Michigan*, 1: 49. Perhaps the Miami were also in southern Michigan prior to the 1700s.

13. “Indian Affairs Around Detroit in 1706,” Speech of Miskouaki, an Ottawa chief, to the Marquis Vaudreuil, Governor of Canada, and His Reply, Lewis Cass Papers, Historical and Archaeological Tracts 8: 1-6, Western Reserve Historical Society, Cleveland, Ohio.







early eighteenth century Indians in southwestern Michigan began forming village clusters around European settlements. The Detroit area, of course, became a major focal point for these settlements. An early document probably written after 1712, listed the following tribal groups and numbers of warriors as residing near Detroit: "The Poutouatamis, 180 warriors; the Huron, 180 warriors; the Outaouas, 200 warriors; and the Mississagues, 60 warriors." There was also a village of Outaouas at Sagium at the end of Lake Huron which had 80 warriors.<sup>15</sup>

Once begun, this pattern of settlement in Detroit continued. A 1718 account giving information on village locations, listed a village of Poutouatamies with 180 warriors living right next to the French fort, a Huron village with 100 men living one-half mile from the fort, and a Outtaous village near the Huron with 110 men and a "number of women." This description also mentioned a village of Mississague with 60-80 men living on an island 12 leagues upstream from Detroit.<sup>16</sup> By 1736 the Indian population at Detroit had increased. A census taken that year listed 200 Huron men, 200 Ottawa men, and 100 Potawatomi men.<sup>17</sup>

Soon maps began taking account of Indian settlements in the area. On the earliest known map, one of Detroit and the surrounding area, several Indian villages were shown. This map, which appeared in Bellin's *Petit Atlas Maritime* in Paris in 1764, was a compilation of two manuscript maps made by Chassegras de Lery in 1749 and 1752. On it were located a "Village de Pouteoatamis," just south of the French fort, a "Village des Outaouais" across the river from the fort, and a "Village des Hurons" just south of the Ottawa village.<sup>18</sup>

Apparently these Indians spent only part of their time in

15. "List of Indian Tribes in the West," in Cadillac Papers, *Michigan Pioneer Collections* 33: 552-53. A 1718 account located Saguinam 30 leagues west of Lake Huron's mouth, in all probability a reference to the entrance of Saginaw Bay. E. D. O'Callaghan, ed., *Documents Relative to the Colonial History of New York* 9 (Albany, 1855): 888-89.

16. *Ibid.*, 888.

17. Howard H. Peckham, *Pontiac and the Indian Uprising* (Chicago, 1961), 30; Silas Farmer, *The History of Detroit and Michigan* (Detroit, 1899), 322.

18. Dennis Massie, "Sir William Johnson in Detroit," *Bulletin of the Detroit Historical Society* 25, No. 6: 4-8.





By about the middle of the 1700s, maps began taking account of Indian settlements in the area of Detroit. This one, made by Chassegras de Lery in 1749, was one of the earliest.

these villages. Though they resided in Detroit during the summer months, they left after harvest time to hunt during the fall and winter months. In the spring, they returned to Detroit to cultivate the yearly crops.<sup>19</sup> Probably some Chippewa also

19. O'Callaghan, *Documents*, 9: 888-89.





This topical map of Detroit by Chassegras de Lery depicts Detroit in 1752. On it are shown the various tribes which settled around Fort Pontchartrain.

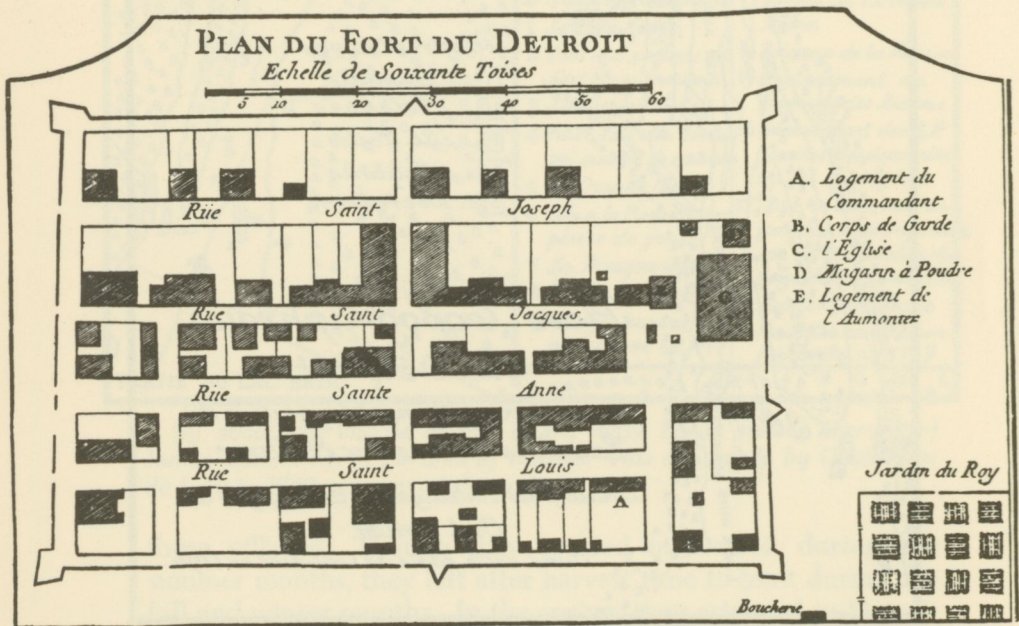


resided in Detroit during the summer but did not have a village of their own.<sup>20</sup>

Not only were there maps of Indian villages in the Detroit area and accounts of Indian life there, but there were several descriptions which gave fragmentary listings of the Indian population in the vicinity. Their accounts listed, among others, slaves who resided there. A Census of Detroit dated September of 1750 listed 33 slaves, called "Panis," describing them as Indians "captured in past wars."<sup>21</sup> In addition, personal recollections written during this time refer to the numbers of Indians living there. Charles Stuart, who had been captured by the Indians between 1755 and 1757, stayed in one of the Indian villages during the 1750s. In his writings, he remembered a Wondot village (Wyandottes of Huron affiliation) as having 60-70 houses, with 230 warriors including warriors aged 10-17; the Tawa (Ottawa) village as having around 90 houses, and the

20. "Detroit Beginnings," *Bulletin of the Detroit Historical Society*, 14, No. 6: 4-32.

21. *Ibid.*, 11.



When Sir William Johnson of the British Indian Affairs Office conducted council meetings at Detroit in 1763, there were 500 Indians who represented 13 different tribes present.





By the spring of 1763, the Ottawa leader, Pontiac had stirred up enough enthusiasm for a siege of Detroit by the Ottawa, the Potawatomi, the Chippewa, and the Huron living in the Detroit area.

Outotoway village (the Potawatomi) as having 32 houses with about 70 warriors—not including young boys.<sup>22</sup>

The pattern of settlement near European outposts in Detroit which were noted on maps and recorded in travelers' accounts continued in the aftermath of the French and Indian wars in North America. Fought between the French and British, these conflicts raged between the years 1754 and 1763, though the main battles were principally over with by the fall of 1760. At that time, the British took charge of Detroit and the fort located there, and, as soon as was practicable, the British attempted to secure a lasting peace with the Indians there. Thus, in 1761, Sir William Johnson of the British Indian Affairs Office conducted council meetings at Detroit. Present were 500 Indians, said to be representatives of 13 different

22. Beverley W. Bond, Jr., ed., "The Captivity of Charles Stuart, 1755-57," *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* 13 (June, 1926): 74-76, copied from the Force Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.



tribes, among whom were the Chippewa, the Ottawa, the Huron, and the Potawatomi of the Detroit and Michigan area.<sup>23</sup>

Unfortunately, this meeting did not produce any lasting results. Accustomed to receiving ammunition, food supplies, and presents from the French, the Indian rebelled at General Jeffrey Amherst's austerity policy. By the spring of 1763, the Ottawa leader Pontiac had stirred up enough enthusiasm for a siege of Detroit by the Ottawa, the Potawatomi, the Chippewa, and the Huron living in the environs of Detroit.

This siege set the precedent for Indian attacks on all the British outposts in the "west" from western New York and Pennsylvania to the Wabash River. The main thrusts of the attack were over by the late fall of the same year, with the tribal groups of the Detroit area eventually making their peace with the British.<sup>24</sup>

With peace came the resettlement of the Ottawa, Chippewa, Potawatomi, and Huron near Detroit. A population estimate compiled in 1778 by Thomas Hutchins listed as "dwelling" at Detroit, 400 Ottawa, 150 Potawatomi, and 250 Wyandott all having their hunting grounds "about Lake Erie." Hutchins also listed 200 Chippewa and Ottawa living in the Saginaw Bay area.<sup>25</sup>

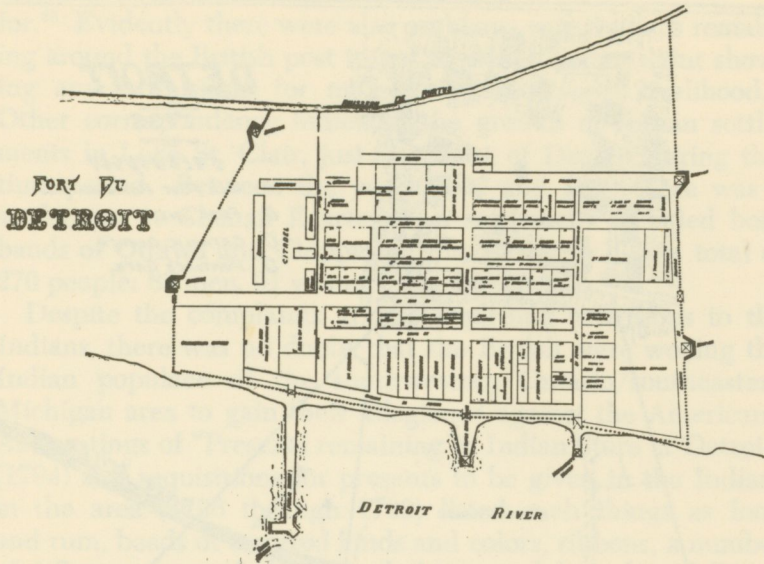
Undoubtedly, this resettlement coupled with increasing depletions of fur for trade and game resources in the lower Michigan/Ontario area, heightened interdependencies between the Indian groups and the Europeans. The Indians were now dependent on European trade goods such as guns and in turn the British and American colonists vied with each other for Indian allies. Not surprisingly, Indian peoples continued living around Detroit and stopped in at the settlement while passing through the area. British records show that by the end of the eighteenth century (probably 1789 according to the archival files at Ottawa), there were 150 Huron, 100 Ottawa, and 150 Poudew (Potawatomi) at Detroit.<sup>26</sup> And, during the last

23. Massie, "Sir William Johnson in Detroit," 6; Peckham, *Pontiac and the Indian Uprising*, chap. 6.

24. See Howard H. Peckham's *Pontiac and the Indian Uprising* for a well-documented account of this Indian "uprising."

25. Henry R. Schoolcraft, *Indian Tribes of the United States*, 6 vols. (Philadelphia, 1853), 6: 114.

26. "List, Location, and Number of Indians (Probably in 1789)," in *Michigan Pioneer Collections* 20 (Lansing, 1892): 306, copied from



FORT DU DETROIT IN 1775

Throughout the last half of the 18th century, Indians became more dependent on European trade goods such as guns. Not surprisingly, Indian peoples continued living around Detroit.

decade of the 1700s there was a steady flow of Indians through the Detroit-Fort Malden area (Fort Malden was a British command post located near the present site of Amherstburg, Ontario) with the Ottawa and Chippewa being the main tribal groups represented.<sup>27</sup>

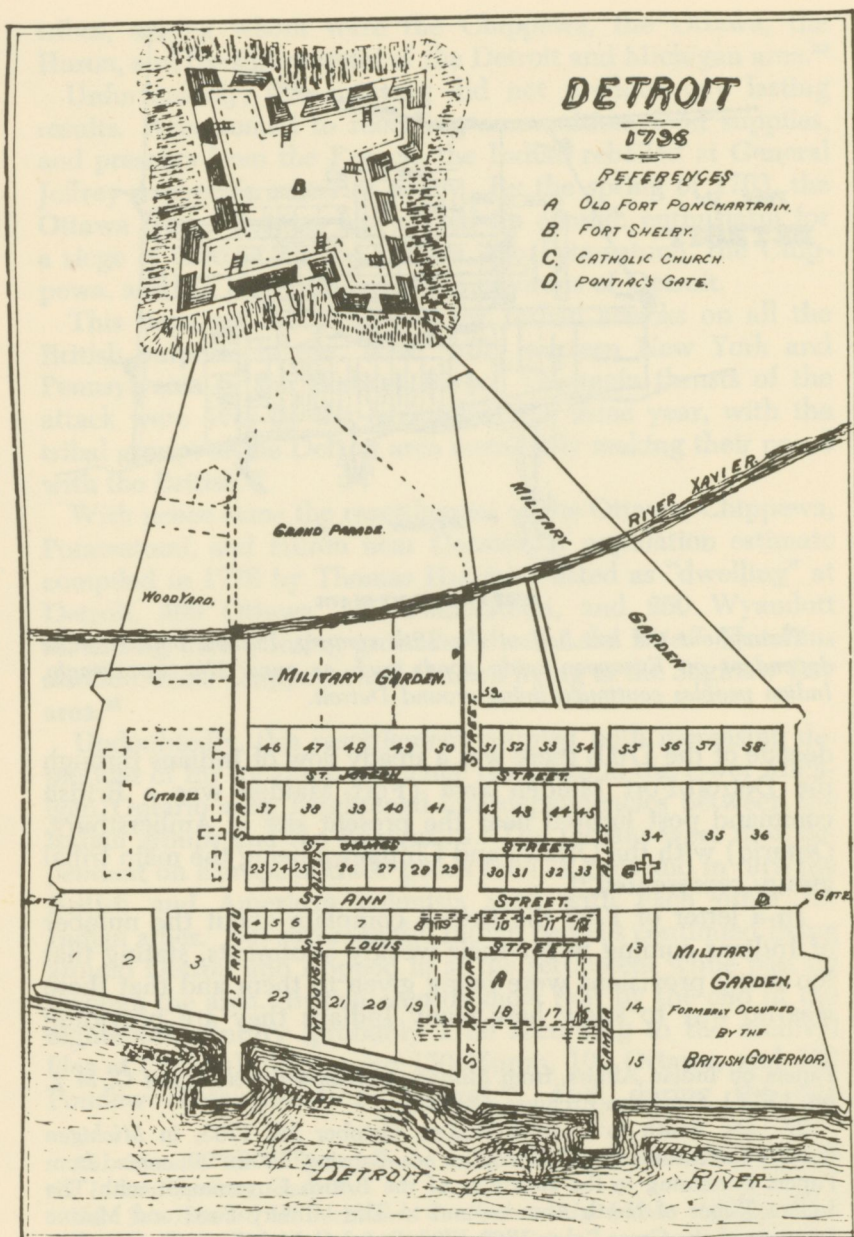
In a letter of 1797 the British complain about the number of Indians coming in for their weekly allotments, stating that too many provisions were being given to them and that there was no way to know how many Indians they are providing

Papers on Indian Affairs, from Military Correspondence, Series C, M 2, pp. 130-31, Canadian Archives, Ottawa.

27. Mr. Smith to Colonel McKee, October 22, 1793, in *Michigan Pioneer Collections* 12 (1887; reprint ed., Lansing, 1908): 90, copied from Papers Pertaining to the Relations of the British Government with The Indian Tribes of North America and to The Military Posts and Marine Interests of the Great Lakes 1762-1799, Series C, M 247, p. 48, Canadian Archives, Ottawa.

28. Captain Hector McLean to Captain James Green, September 14, 1797, in *Michigan Pioneer Collections* 20: 535-38, copied from Papers on Indian Affairs, Military Correspondence, Series C, M 250, p. 145.





By 1797, the British around Detroit began complaining about the number of Indians coming in for weekly allotments and about the work habits of those who remained near the British post.

for.<sup>28</sup> Evidently there were also problems with Indians remaining around the British post to get food and rum without showing any enthusiasm for maintaining their own livelihood.<sup>29</sup> Other correspondence indicated the growth of Indian settlements in Lake St. Clair, just northeast of Detroit during this time period. Between the years 1796 and 1800 there was a settlement at Chenail Ecarte. This settlement included both bands of Ottawa and Chippewa, numbering in 1799 a total of 270 people: 83 men, 91 women, and 96 children.<sup>30</sup>

Despite the complaints arising regarding provisions to the Indians, there was no doubt that the British were wooing the Indian populace of the southwestern Ontario/southeastern Michigan area to gain their allegiance against the Americans. Accountings of "Presents remaining in Indian Store at Detroit" (1794) and requisitions for presents to be given to the Indians in the area (1796 through 1799) listed such things as food and rum, beads of assorted kinds and colors, ribbons, a number of different types of cloth for clothing, medals and medallions, gunpowder and shot for guns, as the main items.<sup>31</sup>

29. Captain Hector McLean to Colonel Thomas McKee, May 10, 1799, in *Michigan Pioneer Collections* 12: 292, copied from Papers Pertaining to the Relations . . . , Series C, M 252, p. 167.

30. See Captain Hector McLean to Captain James Green, October 9, 1797, in *Michigan Pioneer Collections* 20: 554-55, copied from Papers on Indian Affairs, Military Correspondence, Series C, M 250, p. 252; Captain Hector McLean to Captain Mathew Elliott, October 23, 1797, in *Michigan Pioneer Collections* 20: 562-63, copied from Papers on Indian Affairs, Military Correspondence, Series C, M 250, p. 344. Thomas Fraser, "Number of Ottawa and Chippewa Settlers at Chenail Ecarte," July 1798, in *Michigan Pioneer Collections* 20: 617-18, copied from Papers on Indian Affairs, Military Correspondence, Series C, M 251, p. 148; David Price, trans., "Information Relative to Detroit by an Indian," January 31, 1799, in *Michigan Pioneer Collections* 20: 627-28; copied from Papers on Indian Affairs, Military Correspondence, Series C, M 252, p. 50; Charlie Reaume, "Number of Ottawas and Chippewas Settled at Chenail Ecarte," June 27, 1799, in *Michigan Pioneer Collections* 20: 641-42, copied from Papers on Indian Affairs, Military Correspondence, Series C, M 252, p. 145.

31. R. J. England, "Return of Presents," October 6, 1794, in *Michigan Pioneer Collections* 12: 146-47, copied from Papers Pertaining to the Relations . . . , Series C, M 247, p. 308; George Ironside, "Report of Board of Survey," June 13, 1796, in *Michigan Pioneer Collections* 12: 221-25, copied from Papers Pertaining to the Relations . . . , Series C, M 249, p. 250; Joseph Crew, "Indian Presents Requisition," March 5, 1798 in *Michigan Pioneer Collections* 12: 272-77, copied from Papers



By the early 1800s the Americans in charge at Detroit tried to become friends with the Indians. Governor Hull of Michigan Territory wrote to President Jefferson in November of 1807 concerning Indians in the Detroit vicinity. In this letter Hull stated that between 700 and 800 Indians called on him "recently" on their way to their villages, after having just passed through Fort Malden, and he felt compelled to feed them.<sup>32</sup> During the stay of the Indians in Detroit speeches were made by two Indian chiefs: Nanaume, of the Potawatomi Nation, and Pooqueboad of the Chippewa Nation. In these speeches the two assured Governor Hull that they would not take up sides in case a war between the U. S. and Britain started. Pooqueboad stated that the Chippewa would "remain quietly in our villages, taking care of our women and children and cultivating our cornfields."<sup>33</sup> Obviously the Indians in southeastern Michigan were capitalizing on the bad situation between the United States and Britain, playing both sides for provisions and presents. Governor Hull also informed the President that chiefs of the Ottawa and Wyandot (a sub-group of the Huron) had also promised not to go to war.

Colonel Visger, who was employed by the U. S. government as both an interpreter and instructor to Indians in the vicinity of Detroit, wrote to Governor Hull that "successful experiments in agriculture had been made in six villages of Indians, within forty miles of Detroit."<sup>34</sup> So it is evident that Indians were settled in the neighborhood of Detroit prior to the War of 1812.

Accounts show that Indians in southeastern Michigan were still quite numerous, the main tribal entities being the Ottawa, the Chippewa, the Potawatomi, and the Huron (Wyandot). Undoubtedly, when warfare was not being waged, these Indian

Pertaining to the Relations . . . , Series C, M 251, p. 259; and A. McLean, "Indian Presents Requisition," 1799, in *Michigan Pioneer Collections* 12: 283-86, copied from Papers Pertaining to the Relations . . . , Series C, M 252, p. 10.

32. Thomas Jefferson, *Message from the President of the United States Communicating Letters from Governor Hull, Respecting the Indians in the Vicinity of Detroit, Residing Within Our Lines* (Washington, D.C., 1807), 9; Farmer, *The History of Detroit and Michigan*, 1: 323.

33. Jefferson, *Message from the President*, 9.

34. Reverend Jedediah Morse, *A Report to the Secretary of War of the United States on Indian Affairs, Comprising a Narrative of the Indian Tribes in Our Country* (New Haven, 1822), 17.

**TABLE 1:**  
**INDIAN POPULATION IN**  
**MICHIGAN, 1822-1970**

| Census Year | Population | Census Year | Population |
|-------------|------------|-------------|------------|
| 1822        | 5,872      | 1910        | 7,519      |
| 1840        | 9,607      | 1920        | 5,614      |
| 1860        | 6,172      | 1930        | 7,080      |
| 1870        | 4,926      | 1940        | 6,282      |
| 1880        | 7,249      | 1950        | 7,000      |
| 1890        | 5,624      | 1960        | 9,701      |
| 1900        | 6,354      | 1970        | 16,854     |

Note: Evidently the figures for 1840 list Indian population after many of the Potawatomi and some of the Chippewa and Ottawa had been removed to Indian Territory west of the Mississippi River. One source estimated Indian population in Michigan as 40,000 in 1815, 30,000 in 1825, and 10,481 in 1880. Silas Farmer, *The History of Detroit and Michigan* (Detroit, 1889), 324.

Sources: For 1822, U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Eleventh Census of the United States, 1890*, Report of Indians Taxes and Indians Not Taxed in the United States, 6; for 1840, Henry R. Schoolcraft, "Annual Report of the Acting Superintendent of Indian Affairs," Table 5, 26, Schoolcraft Papers, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library, Detroit, Michigan; for 1860-1970, see sources in footnote 59 below.

groups were planting and cultivating crops in the spring and summer months, then spreading out from their villages after the fall harvests to hunt during the late fall and winter months.<sup>35</sup>

Yet, because the Indians were not free of their dependencies on the Europeans, they still found themselves a part of European rivalries. Accordingly, during the War of 1812, many Indians residing in southeastern Michigan were drawn into the American/British hostilities. Led by Tecumseh's eloquent rhetoric and masterful strategies, both of which focused on rid-

35. See Kinietz, *The Indians of the Western Great Lakes, 1615-1760*; Harold Hickerson, *The Chippewa and Their Neighbors: A Study in Ethnohistory* (New York, 1970); Nancy Oestreich Lurie, *Mountain Wolf Woman* (1961; reprint ed., Ann Arbor, 1966); and Wendell H. Oswalt, *This Land Was Theirs* (New York, 1955).



ding the Northwest of the encroaching white settlers, they aided the British. Indians from southeastern Michigan and southwestern Ontario as well as Indians from Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, and Minnesota were present with Tecumseh at Detroit to witness Governor Hull's surrender.

Throughout 1813 and 1814, Indians raided settlements and homesteads around Detroit, killed cattle, drove off horses, took fruit from orchards, and killed some whites. Yet, any gains that the Indians made were short-lived. When the War of 1812 ended, the United States again controlled Detroit and Michigan and the Indians in southeastern Michigan were left bitter and disillusioned.<sup>36</sup>

In the next several years, Indian/white contacts returned to normalcy. Once again Indians remained for at least part of the year near Detroit; once again white authorities began making gifts and payments to insure the friendship of the local Indians. Between 1814 and 1817, Lewis Cass spent \$200,000 for the "benefit of the Indians," and in 1816, he estimated that he had been feeding 400 Indians per day in the city.<sup>37</sup> Gifts, too, were given. Among them were presents of horses to three Ottawa chiefs, three Potawatomi chiefs and three Chippewa chiefs. The Saginaw Chippewa settlement not only received presents, but provisions. And Cass even paid \$8 "for coffin and burying [an] Indian, killed in Detroit" in January of 1820.<sup>38</sup>

Other 1820s Indian settlements in Michigan were mentioned by travelers to the area. In his profile, though not altogether factual, account of his trip through the Upper Great Lakes in 1820, Henry R. Schoolcraft mentioned local tribes.<sup>39</sup> Upon

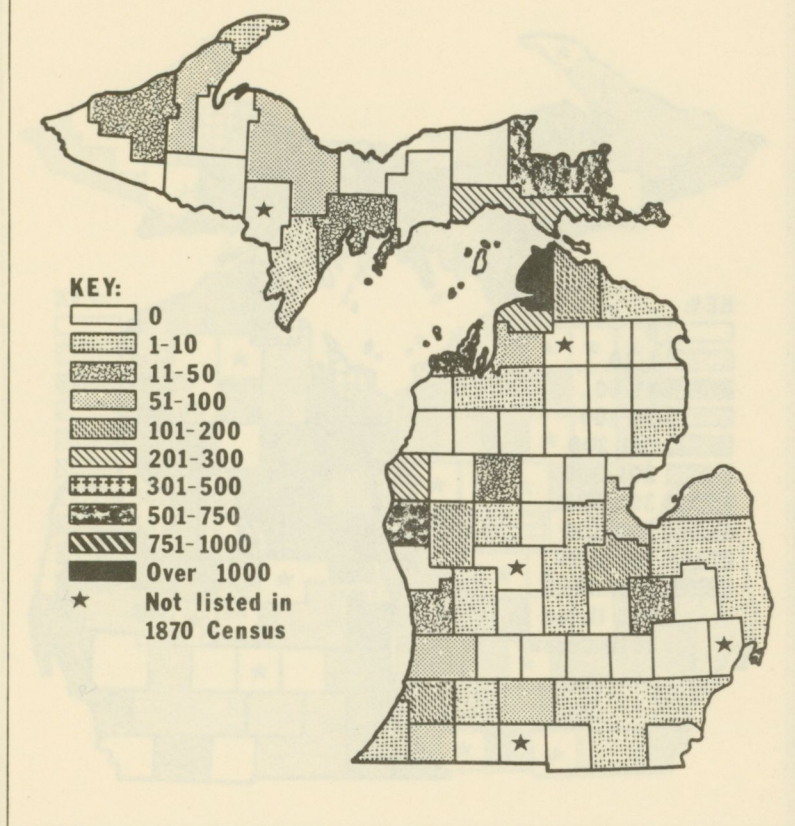
36. Alvin M. Josephy, Jr., *The Patriot Chiefs* (New York, 1858), chap. 5; Friend Palmer Scrapbook, vol. 21, Newspaper clippings on Indian Affairs in Michigan, Palmer Papers, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library, Detroit, Michigan.

37. Friend Palmer, *Early Days in Detroit* (Detroit, 1906), 323; U.S., War Department, Letter from the Secretary of War, Transmitting Information in Relation to the Superintendency of Indian Affairs, in the Territory of Michigan, During the Year 1820, and Part of the Year 1821 (Washington, D.C., 1822), 110; Farmer, *The History of Detroit and Michigan*, 1: 323.

38. U.S., War Department, Letter from the Secretary of War, 82-85.

39. Henry R. Schoolcraft, *Narrative Journal of Travels through the Northwestern Regions of the United States, extending from Detroit through the great chain of American lakes to the sources of the Mississippi River, in the year 1820*, ed. Mentor L. Williams (East Lansing, 1953), 55-61.

## Michigan Native American Population by Counties, 1870



starting up the St. Clair River near Walpole Island, his expedition "passed a number of canoes, in which were generally one family, with their blankets, guns, fishing apparatus, and dogs." Of the Chippewa and Ottawa tribes, "some of these tribes [were] permanently settled on the Canadian shore of the river."<sup>40</sup> Approaching the Saginaw River, Schoolcraft noted that the banks of the stream were inhabited by detached bands of Chippewa and Ottawa.<sup>41</sup>

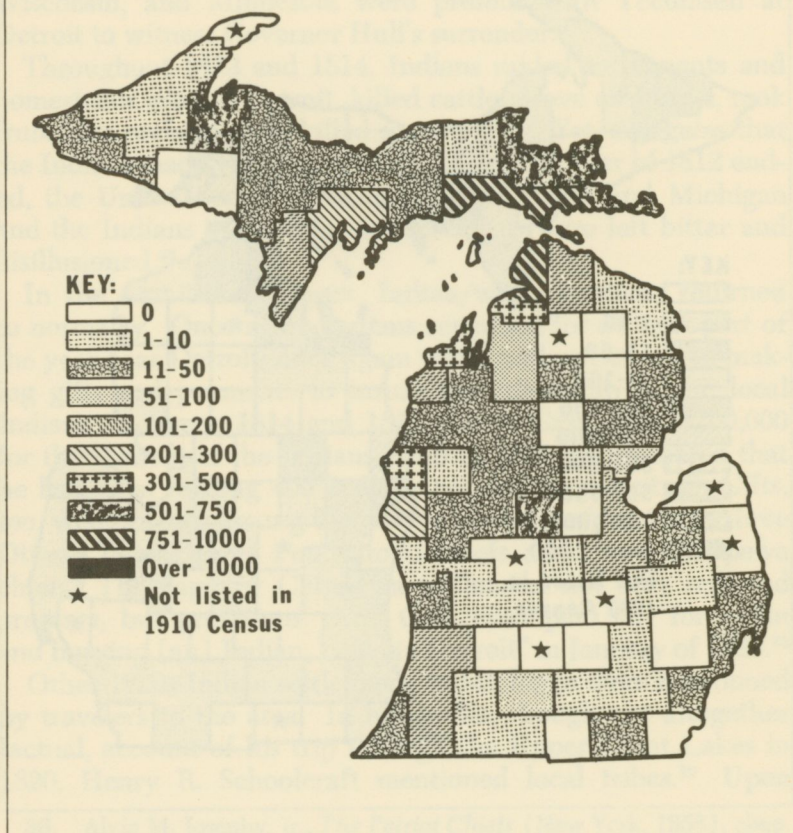
Another visitor also noticed Indians in southeastern Michigan. On his tour of the Great Lakes country in 1826, Thomas

40. *Ibid.*, 63.

41. *Ibid.*, 73.



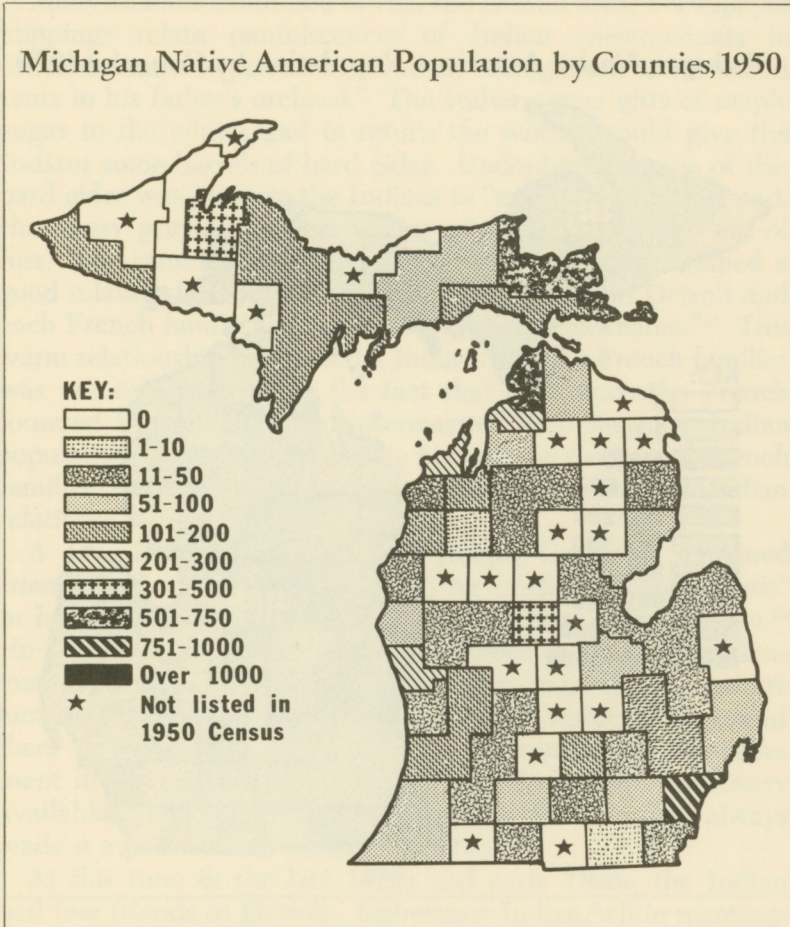
## Michigan Native American Population by Counties, 1910



McKenney of the United States Indian Department traveled through the Detroit area. Though he made no reference to Indians in the city, once out on the St. Clair River, he heard the sounds of the local Indians. Of this he wrote. . . .

At early dawn, my attention was attracted by the beating of an Indian drum, and which to our right, and seemed to be on an island in the distance. On going on shore, and inquiring of a family who live in a log cabin, what it meant was answered, "They have been beating it all night—that an Indian doctor was curing

## Michigan Native American Population by Counties, 1950



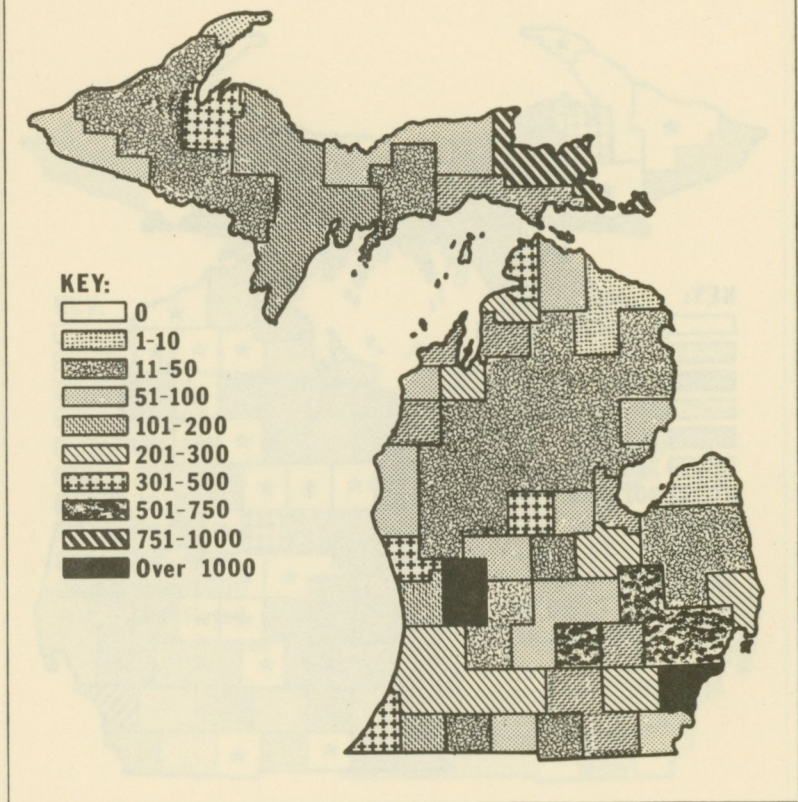
a sick Indian, and this was part of his ceremony. It was beat until he gets better or dies.”<sup>42</sup>

Despite the seemingly peaceful coexistence of Indians and whites in southeastern Michigan in the early nineteenth century, more and more white settlers were pressuring for ownership rights to the fertile lands of southern Michigan, lands which the Indians still owned. Thus, it is not surprising that between

42. Thomas L. McKenney, *Sketches of a Tour of the Lakes, of the Character and Customs of the Chippeway Indians, and of Incidents Connected with the Treaty of Fond du Lack* (Baltimore, 1827), 146.



### Michigan Native American Population by Counties, 1970



the years 1807 and 1836 the Indian groups residing in the Lower Peninsula of Michigan were forced to cede through treaty all of their lands (except for a few small areas) to the United States.<sup>43</sup>

43. The location of Detroit and the surrounding area was ceded in successive treaties: the Treaty of Fort McIntosh in 1785, the Treaty of Fort Harmer in 1789, the Treaty of Greenville in 1795, and the Treaty of Detroit in 1807. The Treaty of Detroit also ceded most of the thumb area in Michigan. The Treaty of Saginaw in 1819 ceded Chippewa rights to lands in the Saginaw Bay area. The Treaty of Chicago in 1821 ceded Ottawa, Chippewa, and Potawatomi lands in southwestern Michigan, and the Treaty of Washington in 1836 ceded Ottawa and Chippewa lands in

Many Indians continued to visit the Detroit area. Newspaper clippings relate reminiscences of Indian encampments in orchards, and one person "remembers seeing often one hundred tents in his father's orchard." The Indians gave gifts of maple sugar to the whites and in return the whites would give the Indians some barrels of hard cider. Undoubtedly, some of this hard cider was given to the Indians to "make them merry" and, thus, easy prey for traders who wanted to cheat them out of furs. The same account stated that the Indians maintained a good relationship with the French families around Detroit and each French family had "at least one Indian nickname."<sup>44</sup> This warm relationship between the Indians and the French families was not surprising given the fact that ever since the French founded Detroit, they had intermarried with the local Indian population. Many Indian women became the mothers of French families but continued to keep their ties with their Indian relatives.

A few Detroit residents like Joseph Campeau remained friends with the Indians. Indeed, he stocked "Indian goods" in his store on the first floor of his Jefferson Avenue home.<sup>45</sup> He was able to converse with the Ojibwa in their native language: "every chief of note knew him intimately and came to him for counsel and advice." Often, in the summer, "scores of them [men, women, and children] . . . squatted on the pavement in front of his place, invading his front steps and every available space" . . . for on their visits to the "city they always made it a point to call on their good friend. . . ."<sup>46</sup>

At this time in the late 1820s and early 1830s, the Indian had few friends in Detroit. Sometimes Indian/white meetings in the city were unpleasant, and contemporary accounts often

the western and northern parts of the Lower Peninsula as well as lands in the eastern part of the Upper Peninsula. In 1842 in the Treaty of La Pointe, the Chippewa ceded the rest of their lands in the Upper Peninsula. For a detailed account of these land cessions see Alpheus Felch, "The Indians of Michigan and the Cession of their Lands to the United States by Treaties," *Michigan Pioneer Collections* 26 (Lansing, 1896): 274-96; and Greenman, *The Indians of Michigan*.

44. Frank B. Woodford, "Detroit Before the War," 32, Frank B. Woodford Papers, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library, Detroit, Michigan.

45. Palmer, *Early Days in Detroit*, 150.

46. *Ibid.*, 166.



spoke of drunken Indians in the city streets and/or murders of both whites and Indians by Indians. Indeed, some of the most unpleasant sights in the early days of the city "were the numerous brawls and quarrels of the Indians."<sup>47</sup>

To aid these Indians and, perhaps, to keep them from causing trouble, the Indian Agency at Detroit provided help for Indians in southeastern Michigan in the 1840s, with much of its activity centered at the Saginaw Indian settlement. Here, agency employees plowed fields, built and repaired houses, and did blacksmithing work for them. Here, too, these employees also started schools and churches.<sup>48</sup>

By the early 1850s most of southeastern Michigan was devoid of visible signs of Indian occupation. Treaty cessions had forced the Native Americans off the fertile farmland areas which were coveted by white settlers. In addition, the once lucrative fur trade which had brought the Indians with their furs to the major white settlements in southeastern Michigan had petered out.<sup>49</sup> Thus, much of the Indian population quietly vanished into the rural areas or was put onto reservations. The Potawatomi community at Athens, in Calhoun County, was started in 1844 as a refuge for those Potawatomi who refused to leave their southwestern Michigan homeland. Mount Pleasant Reservation (Isabella County) was formed in 1855.<sup>50</sup>

Reportedly, Chief Okemos and his band of Chippewa traveled throughout southeastern Michigan in the late 1830s, 1840s and early 1850s, selling baskets and other craftwork for food. They made regular stops at Lansing, Saginaw, and Detroit.<sup>51</sup> In the late 1840s and early 1850s there were still a few bands of Indians who would camp on the outskirts of the Detroit area and trade with the white farmers. One such band of Chippewa had a camp on land which is now the intersection of Ohio

47. *Ibid.*, 164.

48. Henry R. Schoolcraft, "Annual Report of the Acting Superintendent of Indian Affairs for Michigan," 15 ff., Henry R. Schoolcraft Papers, Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library, Detroit, Michigan.

49. See Hickerson, *The Chippewa and Their Neighbors*, for a discussion of the decline of the fur trade among the Minnesota and Wisconsin Chippewa.

50. Greenman, *The Indians of Michigan*, 37; U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Eleventh Census of the United States, 1890*, Report on Indians Taxed and Indians Not Taxed in the United States, 332.

51. Greenman, *The Indians of Michigan*, 38.

and Marygrove Streets in Detroit.<sup>52</sup> Evidently, by the late 1850s, Indians were infrequently seen on Detroit streets, as illustrated by the following newspaper account:

INDIANS.—We noticed four aborigines yesterday, on seeing whom we could not but reflect on the great changes that have taken place in our city in fifteen years. In 1838, a person, by merely glancing through almost any street, could see parties of these children of the forest scattered throughout its entire length. Many were the Indian dances that took place, about that time, near Woodworth's Hotel, on the corner of Brush and Woodbridge streets; and horrible were the grimaces and discordant the yells, of the dusky-featured performers, as they hopped and writhed with the utmost agility, destitute, as they were, of nearly every article of clothing. Now, it is comparatively rarely that one of them is to be seen. They are almost gone, and in a short time, their former existence among us will we know only through the medium of tradition. Farewell, "Injuns" "Nitchees," a long farewell!<sup>53</sup>

Throughout the last half of the nineteenth century, reports of Indians occurred only infrequently in Detroit newspapers. These sketchy accounts gave little information, merely taking note of "gentle Indian maidens sell [ing] pin cushions on the Camp Martius," or "about 20 LO's [Indians] from Canada with a goodly supply of baskets, bows, and arrows and bead work. . .", or of "A squad of nine Indians" who came to the city to dispose of baskets of all shapes and sizes."<sup>54</sup>

Soon even these accounts disappeared. By the end of the century, the Indians in Detroit and in Michigan in general had become almost invisible. They stood defenseless and their spokesmen were few. Lamenting their fate, Andrew Blackbird,

52. William W. Bunge, *Fitzgerald: Geography of a Revolution* (Cambridge, 1971), 9.

53. *Detroit Free Press*, April 29, 1853.

54. *Detroit Free Press*, September 13, 1874; *Detroit Free Press*, June 2, 1875; and *Detroit Free Press*, May 4, 1876.



**TABLE 2:**  
**URBAN AND RURAL NATIVE**  
**AMERICANS IN MICHIGAN, 1910-1970**

| Census Year | Urban Population |                     | Rural Population |                     |
|-------------|------------------|---------------------|------------------|---------------------|
|             | Number           | Percentage of Total | Number           | Percentage of Total |
| 1910        | 427              | 5.6                 | 7,092            | 94.3                |
| 1920        | 850              | 15.1                | 4,764            | 84.8                |
| 1930        | 1,849            | 26.1                | 5,231            | 73.8                |
| 1940        | 1,558            | 24.8                | 4,724            | 75.1                |
| 1950        | 2,582            | 36.8                | 4,418            | 63.1                |
| 1960        | 5,007            | 51.6                | 4,694            | 48.3                |
| 1970        | 11,209           | 66.5                | 5,645            | 33.4                |

Note: The 1970 census data for American Indians as reported in U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Nineteenth Census of the United States, 1970*, Final Report PC (2)-If, *American Indians*, does not agree with U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Nineteenth Census of the United States, 1970: Population*, vol. 1, pt. 24, table 17, pp. 24-63. The former listed the total Native American population in Michigan as 16,012 (10,541 urban and 4,471 rural); the latter listed the total Native American population in Michigan as 16,854 (11,209 urban and 5,645 rural).

Sources: For sources, see footnote 59 below.

an Ottawa chief from Harbor Springs, declared that there was . . . no peace nor shelter for the Indians, from injustice. They are exposed to hate, to be shot at, and to be robbed, in every way and manner, of their little possessions of land which the government has allotted to them in treaties. They are cheated by the crooked works of the law.<sup>55</sup>

So complete was this process that the Superintendent of the Tomah Indian Agency would maintain in the 1940s that "As far as habits, thinking, and mode of living . . . the picturesque Indian of history no longer exists. He had been assimilated."<sup>56</sup>

55. Andrew Blackbird, *The Indian Problem, from the Indian's Standpoint* (Ypsilanti, 1900), 11.

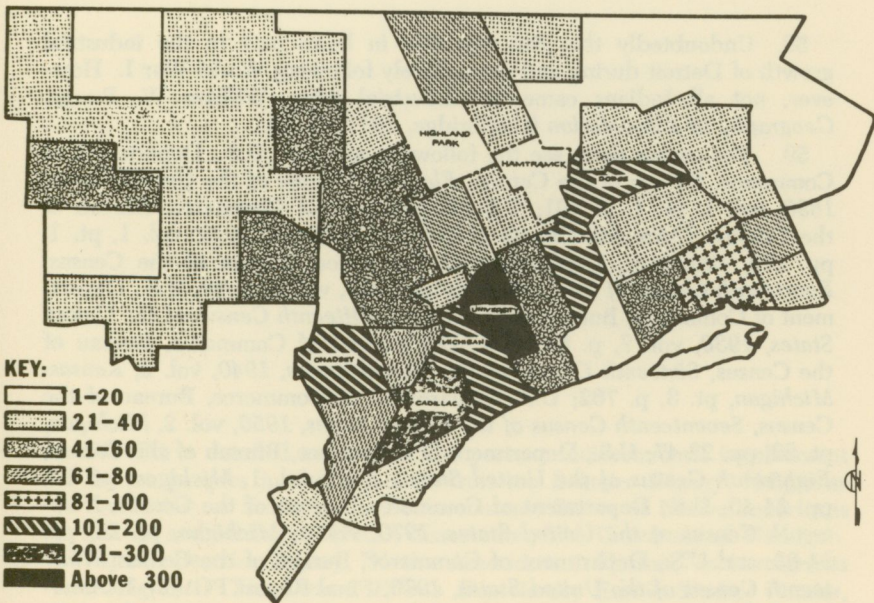
56. Frances Densmore, *A Study of Michigan Indians*, The University of Michigan, Anthropological Papers, No. 1 (Ann Arbor, 1949), 33-34.

While the Indian stood forgotten, he had left his mark on the city of Detroit. His trails, radiating out from the original Fort Detroit, became the city's main streets. The Sauk Trail became Michigan Avenue, the Grand River Trail became Grand River Avenue, the Saginaw Trail became Woodward Avenue, and the Fort Gratiot Trail became Gratiot Avenue. It was along these streets that Detroit grew outward and eventually, spread into the suburbs.<sup>57</sup>

Invisible, forgotten, or assimilated, the Indian continued living in Michigan. Census records proved that. These same records also show two interesting trends for the period from 1870 to 1970. First, during the late 1800s, there was a return of the Indian population to rural areas following the decline of the fur trade. These areas were the Keweenaw Bay area, the

57. See Robert Sinclair, "The Face of Detroit: A Spatial Synthesis" (Ph.D. dissertation, Wayne State University, 1970).

### Detroit Native American Population by Subcommunities, 1970





Sault Ste. Marie area, the upper northwest sections of the Lower Peninsula (Emmet, Charlevoix, Cheboygan, Antrim, and Leelanau counties), the Saginaw River, and the Allegan County area. Population density rose swiftly in Isabella County in 1880 due to the growing concentration of Indian people on the Mount Pleasant Reservation. Second, following this concentration, there was a very gradual movement toward the urban areas, starting with a slow rise in the Detroit and Wayne County Indian population in 1920.<sup>58</sup>

This movement to the cities proceeded at a slow rate for decades. Suddenly in the 1950s and the 1960s, the major cities showed a large increase in their Indian population caused by a major inward migration from rural areas. Yet, at the same time, major rural areas of Indian concentration maintained rather high population densities though decreasing percentage-wise in population. In addition, a new concentration of Indians living in a predominantly small-town environment emerged in the southwestern corner of Michigan in the 1950s and 1960s. Apparently, they moved to this setting so that they could commute to major urban centers like Chicago, Gary, South Bend, and Kalamazoo while continuing to reside in a small town.<sup>59</sup>

58. Undoubtedly this rise was due in large part to the industrial growth of Detroit during and immediately following World War I. However, not all Indians came for industrial jobs. William W. Bunge, *Geography of a Revolution* (Cambridge, 1971), 3, 56.

59. For census data, see the following sources: U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Eleventh Census of the United States, 1890*, vol. 1, pt. 1, p. 401; U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910*, vol. 1, pt. 1, pp. 170, 196; U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920*, vol. 2, p. 89; U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930*, vol. 2, p. 65; U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Sixteenth Census of the United States, 1940*, vol. 2, *Kansas-Michigan*, pt. 3, p. 762; U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Seventeenth Census of the United States, 1950*, vol. 2, *Michigan*, pt. 22, pp. 22-47; U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Eighteenth Census of the United States, 1960*, vol. 1, *Michigan*, pt. 24, pp. 24-40; U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Nineteenth Census of the United States, 1970*, vol. 1, *Michigan*, pt. 24, pp. 24-63; and U.S., Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Nineteenth Census of the United States, 1970*, Final Report PC (2)-1, *American Indians*, p. 1.

This recent movement of Indian population was really no different than that which took place in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Each was based upon a need to interact economically. Two hundred years ago, the Indians settled near Detroit to trade their furs, meat, and corn for European goods and to gain protection from their enemies. In the early 1900s, they returned to the metropolitan areas, coming as unskilled and skilled laborers to work in the industrial center. Once begun, this movement has continued at a growing pace. Again, Detroit has become a place for economic exchange with white society; this time it is in the form of employment. Still, as in the past, the economic dependency of the Indian on the white society remains constant.<sup>60</sup>

60. For a detailed account of the present socioeconomic involvement of Indian peoples in the life of Detroit see Beatrice Bigony, "Migrants to the Cities: A Study of the Socioeconomic Status of Native Americans in Detroit and Michigan" (Ph.D. dissertation, The University of Michigan, 1974) and Beatrice Bigony, "Native Americans in Detroit," in *Immigrants and Migrants: The Detroit Ethnic Experience*, Ethnic Studies Reader, *Journal of University Studies* 10, Nos. 2-4 (Spring-Winter, 1974): 345-66.